

BMTS Article Digest March – April 2016

BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee Members:

The following is a compilation of articles that may be of interest to BMTS Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee members. This and past digests can also be accessed in the Pedestrian & Bicycle Advisory Committee page of www.bmtsonline.com.

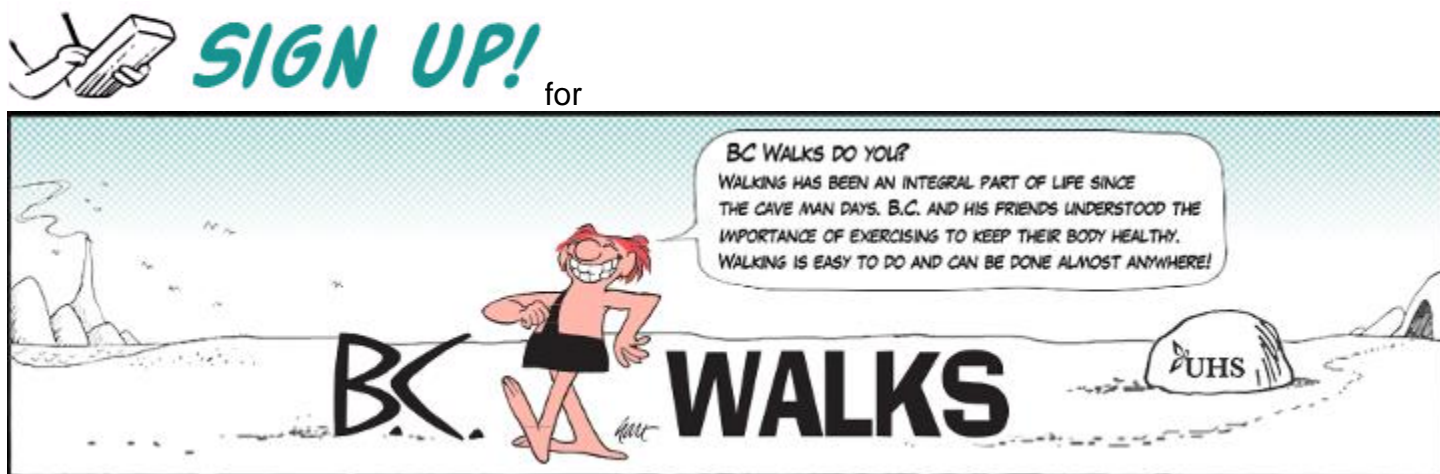
Scott



Take a look at the National Center for Bicycling & Walking's newsletter, **CenterLines**. You can also arrange to have it emailed directly to you.

See <http://www.bikewalk.org/newsletter.php>.

CenterLines is the bi-weekly electronic news bulletin of the National Center for Bicycling & Walking. **CenterLines** is our way of quickly delivering news and information you can use to create more walkable and bicycle-friendly communities.



Go to www.BCWalks.com!

Check out these websites for Bike & Pedestrian Information!



<https://www.facebook.com/coexistnys/> and <https://www.youtube.com/user/CoexistNYS>
or www.capitalcoexist.org

In particular, view the interactive educational video clips.

Is Walkability Good for the Economy?

DAVID HILL

If you lived in the neighborhood near Galaxy Brewing in downtown Binghamton, you could do most of your errands on foot. Same with the Twin River Commons nearby.

Out on Lewis Road near Binghamton, where [pressconnects.com](#) and the Press & Sun-Bulletin has its offices, it's totally car-dependent. We knew this already. On Park Place near Elmira College, some errands can be accomplished on foot. If you lived on West Martin Luther King Jr./State Street in Ithaca, you'd be in a "walker's paradise," where daily errands do not

"Quality of life is critically important to the private sector. ... Therefore, we must create attractive public realms that celebrate our heritage, and that simultaneously speak to our walkable communities and availability and diversity in housing." SOUTHERN TIER'S WINNING SUBMISSION TO THE UPSTATE REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE



The area around Court and Washington streets in downtown Binghamton gets a high Walkscore from Redfin, a national real estate brokerage that rates how car-dependent places are.

DAVID HILL / STAFF PHOTO



Ithaca's Collegetown neighborhood is a "walker's paradise" in the Redfin Walkscore rating of how pedestrian friendly certain locations are.

SIMON WHEELER / STAFF PHOTO

require a car. These descriptions are from the Walk Score for each location by Redfin, a national real estate brokerage. Redfin uses an algorithm that incorporates walking routes, depth of choice, pedestrian friendliness, population and neighborhood data. Galaxy Brewing's address gets a rating of 85. Lewis Road gets a 3, "car dependent." The neighborhood

around Elmira College, specifically the 700 block of Park Place, gets a 73, for "very walkable." Downtown Ithaca, near the Ithaca

Journal, a “walker’s paradise,” gets a 97. By comparison, New York City, Redfin’s top rated walkable place among its ranking of big cities last year, gets only an 88. What does all this have to do with the upstate and Southern Tier economy?

In a word, liveability. Among many in urban planning and economic development circles today, if communities do not require cars, they will be more attractive places to live, particularly among workers under about age 40, who are less likely to own cars than previous generations, and who are generally regarded as valuing having amenities close by. It’s worth noting that it’s not only young workers who prize getting around without driving. It could be argued that aging in place, the concept of planning one’s housing so as to not have to move when one can no longer, for example, climb stairs or step into a deep bathtub, applies to transportation infrastructure, too. If driving isn’t necessary to remain economically productive — in other words, hold down a job — as one ages, Southern Tier residents seeking a working retirement or putting off retirement may find the region more attractive, too. Young families, too, may value being able to get children to school, the grocery store and even to work without driving at all or as much as in more car-dependent communities.

Improved urban life is a major thrust of the Southern Tier’s winning submission to the Upstate Revitalization Initiative, the contest for a half-billion dollars in economic aid parceled out over five years. The plan envisions revitalized urban centers — in particular in Binghamton, Johnson City and Endicott — built around, respectively, general downtown life, a health sciences and pharmaceutical complex, and advanced manufacturing in the legacy of IBM.

The submission is no economic Bible, but one passage sums up this approach: “Quality of life is critically important to the private sector. Our human capital and institutional resources will ultimately depend on having vibrant urban cores. Vibrant communities have the capacity to improve perceptions of the region; without them, private investment, new residents, innovation and entrepreneurship will be difficult to capture. Therefore, we must create attractive public realms that celebrate our heritage, and that simultaneously speak to our walkable communities and availability and diversity in housing.”

Redfin’s rating is no final word on walkability. Its algorithm does not always take into account pedestrian routes that do not link together well or are split by highways or rivers. Many residents of highly rated neighborhoods in the region will note that supermarkets aren’t always close by. Lack of a full-service supermarket near Ithaca’s Collegetown, for example, has been an issue there.

Likewise, a lack of housing near amenities holds back some parts of the area, such as much of downtown Elmira, which gets a high Redfin walkscore but lacks a lot of housing options.

Improving walkability isn’t easy. Low ratings are largely a legacy of infrastructure and planning decisions made decades ago when the priority was moving lots of cars fast. Many parts of the region remain cut up by high speed highways built in the middle of the 20th century. Think the Vestal Parkway, which leaves the main BU campus virtually on its own; the Clemens Center Parkway in Elmira; and Route 13 through Ithaca, where a separation of north- and southbound lanes in the late 1990s left a residential island in between.

But Southern Tier communities are working on non-car transit. Consultant LaBella Associates, hired by the Elmira- Chemung Transportation Council to study three potential bicycle-friendly routes to link downtown Elmira and Arnot Mall, recommended a nine-mile route that would use Davis Street, Oakwood Avenue, Grand Central Avenue, West Broad Street and Colonial Drive. Cost is pegged at \$800,000. In Broome County, plans are drawn up for a path connecting the main Binghamton University campus in Vestal to downtown Binghamton.

Ithaca already is known as walkable. A 2014 U.S. Census Bureau report noted Ithaca, at 42percent, had one of the highest percentages of people who walk to work in the country — though that may be largely because Tompkins County’s dominant employer, Cornell University, blends into adjacent and highly walkable neighborhoods. But the city has developed a couple of bicycle boulevard routes designed to make biking easier, particularly from the Southside, Northside and Fall Creek residential neighborhoods to elementary, middle and high schools in the city. Adding bike lanes and sidewalk to a portion of Old Elmira Road was met with opposition, but the city got a grant and completed the work to better link the nearby residential neighborhood to the rest of the city’s sidewalk and bike network.

While there is room for improvement, there is much to build on when it comes to walkability.

For example: 7 Hawley St. in downtown Binghamton, where the city envisions market-rate housing and commercial development, gets a respectable 78 score — something to build on. Many Sunbelt communities built around car-dependent suburbs would likely envy the rating.

Relative walkability is one reason Johnson City Mayor Greg Deemie believes his village was picked as the site of the new Binghamton University School of Pharmacy. Students will be walking between the new school, planned for 98 Corliss Ave., and their clinical training at nearby UHS Wilson Medical Center.

That address gets an 82 rating on Redfin's Walk Score, meaning most errands can be done on foot. Given that the village is only about 4.5 square miles, most anywhere within it would be within walking distance of the hospital, Deemie pointed out when he and Binghamton Mayor Richard David spoke to the SUNY Business and Education Cooperative of the Southern Tier back in February.

"They may be walking from there to where they're living within the village, or walking there to a café or a restaurant or something, so that's the whole idea behind the whole walkable community, because they don't want them to have to drive from the school to the hospital or whatever," Deemie said.



Pedestrians cross against the traffic light at the intersection of College Avenue and Dryden Road looking up Dryden Road toward the Linden Avenue intersection.

SIMON WHEELER / STAFF PHOTO, SIMON WHEELER / STAFF PHOTO

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Friday, 18 March 2016

NY pays \$1.6M to bicyclist hit by state trooper in WP

ANTHONY BORRELLI

New York State has paid \$1.6 million to a U.S. Marine Corps veteran who was injured after being struck by a state trooper's vehicle while riding her bicycle in Whitney Point.

The trooper's car struck retired Maj. Mary-Margaret Smith, from Virginia, at 9:42 a.m. on July 5, 2010, while riding in the area of Liberty and Collins streets, according to police. She suffered head and facial injuries.

On Feb. 25, the state paid to resolve Smith's personal injury claim stemming from the accident and a trial in the Court of Claims, according to a news release Monday from her attorney, John Perticone, of Vestal.

"I was always confident in Major Smith's integrity and the validity of the case," Perticone said in a statement. "It was important to me that she receive a just decision."

Police had said Smith, then 47, entered into the path of the trooper's vehicle while riding her bicycle. But it was successfully demonstrated at trial that Smith never entered the intersection and the primary cause of the accident was the trooper's negligence, Perticone said. Smith had been visiting family in Whitney Point for the Fourth of July weekend, according to Perticone. Court papers say the trooper — he was not identified by name — was making a left turn onto Liberty Street but "cut the corner a little

sharp” and hit Smith. Police said she was thrown from her bicycle into the windshield of the trooper’s vehicle. She was treated at UHS Wilson Medical Center in Johnson City.

In a statement Monday, Smith said this accident “turned my life upside down.”

On Oct. 23, 2014, the state Appellate Division Third Department in Albany affirmed a 2013 verdict from the Court of Claims in Smith’s favor.

Perticone said a second trial had been scheduled for Jan. 25 of this year to determine the extent of Smith’s damages, but the state offered to settle the claim.

The settlement was approved by the New York State Comptroller’s Office before the payment was made.

“I was always confident in Major Smith’s integrity and the validity of the case. It was important to me that she receive a just decision.”

JOHN PERTICONE

ATTORNEY FOR MARY-MARGARET SMITH, VETERAN HIT BY STATE TROOPER

How America’s “Worst Walking City” Got Back on its Feet

When Oklahoma City was named the least walkable city in America, residents approved an \$18 million sidewalk improvement project to help their community get moving.



Jay Walljasper posted Mar 25, 2016

This article was originally published by [Resilience](#).

The United States gave up on walking in the mid-20th Century—at least planners and politicians did. People on foot were virtually banished from newly constructed neighborhoods. Experts assured us that cars and buses (and eventually helicopters and jet packs) would efficiently take us everywhere we wanted to go.

Thankfully, most Americans refused to stop walking. Today—even after seventy years of auto-centered transportation policies—more than 10 percent of all trips are on foot, according to Paul Herberling of the U.S. Department of Transportation. That number rises to 28 percent for trips under one mile.

Indeed, we are in the midst of a walking renaissance as millions of people discover a daily stroll can prevent disease, boost energy, ease stress, connect us with our communities, and is just plain fun. The number of us who regularly take a walk has risen 6 percent in the last decade, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. According to a new study from the National Association of Realtors, 79 percent of Americans—this number rises for those under 35—want to be within easy walking distance of places.

Even Oklahoma City—which was named as the “worst U.S. walking city” in a 2008 study of 500 communities by *Prevention* magazine and the American Podiatric Medical Association—is embarking on big plans to become more walkable.

“Bleak” is how Jeff Speck, urban planner and author of *Walkable City*, described walking in Oklahoma City seven years ago. “Traffic sped too fast...for pedestrians to feel comfortable on the sidewalks...oversized traffic lanes encouraged highway speeds,” he wrote in *Planning* magazine.

Oklahoma City also suffered from perhaps the worst sidewalk network in America. Most other towns conscientiously built sidewalks until the 1950s, but Oklahoma City abandoned the effort as early as the 1930s in some neighborhoods.

Mick Cornett, the city’s Republican mayor since 2004, notes, “We had built an incredible quality of life, if you happened to be a car. But if you were a person, you were seemingly combating the car all day.”

“We probably *were* last in the country for walking,” Cornett admits.

This rock-bottom rating really stung in a community that had earlier been passed over by United Airlines as the site for a new maintenance facility because, despite the city’s generous financial incentives, the company’s CEO said he couldn’t imagine asking his managers to move to Oklahoma City.

Then, a year after the walking rankings, the city again found itself in the harsh glare of unwanted media attention. This time *Men’s Fitness* magazine stigmatized Oklahoma City as the “#2 fattest city” in America. Among the country’s 100 largest cities, only Miami was more corpulent.

That’s all changing now. An ambitious \$18-million sidewalk improvement fund was approved by voters as part of a tax increase that also included money for parks, transit, bike trails, and senior wellness centers around town. Four busy streets heading into downtown are now being narrowed, with new “smart intersections” that provide walkers more safety with “refuge island” medians in the middle of streets and clearly marked crosswalks.

So what’s driving all this pedestrian progress?

Mayor Cornett, a former sportscaster, bristled at his city being called fat and sedentary. Yet he knew that he couldn’t credibly deny these charges since he’d gained enough extra pounds while in office to be labeled obese, thanks to endless rounds of breakfast and lunch meetings.

Cornett launched an initiative to get the city back in shape. Over the past seven years, he notes, Oklahoma City has added hundreds of miles of new sidewalks, built eight miles of bike lanes on the streets (there were none in 2008), added 100 more miles to the recreational trail network, built new gyms at many public schools, created a public rowing center and started work on an whitewater kayak and rafting course on the Oklahoma River. Low-income neighborhoods, where health and obesity issues are most severe, are the biggest focus of the city’s programs for healthy eating and active living.

Cornett also issued a successful Challenge for Oklahoma City residents to lose one million pounds. More than 47,000 people signed up, and lost on average 20 pounds. Cornett himself shed 38.

One major thrust of this campaign was working with fast-food restaurants to offer healthier menus. Cornett is proud of this partnership and during our interview slipped into his office closet to fetch a life-size cardboard cut-out of himself posing with Taco Bell’s low-fat options, which was displayed in the chain’s 40 Oklahoma City restaurants.

This all seems to be making a difference—the growth in Oklahoma City’s obesity rate has slowed significantly from 6 percent annually to 1 percent, with the stage set for further reduction.

The mayor is quick to share credit. First and foremost, he applauds local citizens, who in 2010 voted to continue a one-cent addition to the sales tax for seven more years to pay for health initiatives. Oklahoma, he points out, is a very conservative state—the only one where Obama did not carry a single county in either 2008 or 2012. Yet Oklahomans are willing to support

taxes when they know where their money is going. “They like projects where they can see the results,” he says. “And this is not debt and it’s not a permanent tax—it’s up for renewal every few years.”

Cornett views this spending as a smart business move, noting that the 2010 tax referendum, and two earlier ones under previous mayors focusing on downtown revitalization, public education, and overall quality of life, amassed \$2 billion in public investment that, in turn, spawned \$6 billion more in private development.

“Ever since we decided to make this a great place for people to live, the jobs started coming here, and young Millennials, who want to bike and walk, are arriving in numbers we’ve never seen before,” he says. “We are creating a city where your kids and grandkids will choose to stay. They used to go to Dallas or Houston.”

“It turned out that one thing people—especially young people—wanted was better sidewalks,” Cornett explains. That’s why the city now builds new sidewalks as part of most repaving projects and kicks in half the cost for any homeowner or neighborhood that wants them. Developers are now required to provide sidewalks in all new projects. As for the \$18 million earmarked for sidewalks from sales tax revenue, “most of it goes where we know we need sidewalks, connecting schools and shopping centers with neighborhoods,” the mayor says.

While most people consider walking essential to a good neighborhood, there’s still a lot of opposition. “We hear from those who say, ‘We don’t need sidewalks, because no one walks here,’” Cornett says, noting that the absence of sidewalks is a big reason people don’t walk.

The city is in the early stages of initiating a Safe Routes to Schools program, making it possible for more school kids to walk or bike, and a Vision Zero campaign, aimed at eliminating all traffic fatalities in the city, says Dennis Blind of the city’s planning department. The city also holds Open Streets events—festivals where a street is blocked off to vehicles so people of all ages can reclaim the streets (temporarily) as public space.

“We’ve come a long ways in a short time,” says Cristina Fernandez, who moved from Santa Monica—one of the most walkable communities in California—for an executive position at a local firm. “But we still have a long ways to go.”

Walkscore, which rates the walkability of any address in America, still ranks Oklahoma City in the lower 15 percent of cities over 200,000, which is nonetheless a big improvement over last place. The city’s low score can be partly explained by the fact that sprawling subdivisions, which would be classified as separate municipalities elsewhere, are inside the city limits here.

The epicenter of walking in Oklahoma City is downtown and nearby neighborhoods, which exhibit all the signs of urban vitality: sidewalk cafes, new loft apartments, refurbished old neighborhoods with local business districts, indie shops and restaurants, nightlife, sports and entertainment venues, well-populated parks, riverside bike trails, and sidewalks alive with people of all ages walking between all these spots.

An old warehouse district with a pedestrian promenade along a canal thrums with activity. A 70-acre central park is being developed that will connect downtown with a largely Latino neighborhood on the South Side via a new pedestrian bridge. A streetcar line debuts later this year that will loop through many of these neighborhoods. Protected bike lanes will soon appear on major arteries coming in and out of downtown.

Oklahoma City’s mission now is to widen the walkable section of the city outward. Local transit service has been improved (including new Sunday and evening buses), resulting in a sizable jump in ridership. The Wheeler District, a new pedestrian-focused infill neighborhood south of downtown, breaks ground this year with plans to create 2,000 homes.

North of downtown, things are already picking up. “You have a lot of young people moving into the area because they can walk,” says Fernandez, who lives in the Crown Heights neighborhood. Business districts scattered throughout this part of town, some of which once harbored crack houses and brothels, now flourish with restaurants and shops catering to local residents.

Fernandez, her husband, and kids are still waiting for sidewalks on their street but already are walking more “because there are now more places to walk to.” An attractive streetscape to improve the pedestrian ambience of the Western Avenue business district near their home makes walking more fun.

“When we go anywhere in the neighborhood now, we usually go on foot,” she says.



Incorporating On-Road Bicycle Networks

The U.S. Federal Highway Administration has released a report that provides guidance to transportation agencies for integrating bicycle facilities into their resurfacing program, including methods for fitting bicycle facilities onto existing roads, cost considerations, and case studies.

E-Newsletter Type: [Federal Research News](#)

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